



Good afternoon Mr. Chair and members of the committee. My name is Tricia Smith, and I represent the 20,000 members of Oregon School Employees Association. OSEA members include the classified employees working in our Head Start agencies, school districts, ESDs, and community colleges.

SB 470 was requested to address the crisis these members and their families face when they are laid off and without income for months each year because their employers have shut their doors between academic years. I use the word crisis, because for these educators that is exactly what happens for them. You will hear first hand their stories, and you will see the many more from educators who could not take the time away from work to be here in person.

Many legislators and the public are content in the knowledge that classified school employees are highly trained in their professions.

- School bus drivers, for example, are the most highly trained professional drivers on the road today. They must not only know and understand how to navigate a huge vehicle in traffic, they must also know and understand how to drive while at the same time manage scores of children riding the bus.
- Custodians are not just custodians today; they must understand and be trained on issues such as infectious disease transmission, integrated pest management, student behavior management, and building systems maintenance and repair.
- Where once there may have been a staff of IT professionals which allowed for specialization, today there may be only one remaining who must know how to do everything from networks to desktops, from district financial management programs to student iPad use and programming.
- Instructional assistants, many of whom have teaching degrees, teach our most vulnerable students, from the youngest in Head Start to the struggling high school student. They must know how to provide instruction and understand effective behavior management techniques - and in the case of special education assistants, also understand how to provide certain medical procedures.

Whether they drive a school bus, keep major building systems operational, assure classrooms are clean and free of pathogens, install and repair technology, or provide direct teaching to students; classified employees help educate our students and allow schools to run safely and efficiently every day.

These are professionals who have chosen the education of our state's children as their calling and they hope to remain in their field throughout their careers. This is a workforce upon whom we all depend, and more importantly, upon which our students and school districts depend.

However, many legislators and the public are unaware that:

- Classified school employees' ability to continue to work in the professions they love is challenged every day by the knowledge that they are shortchanging their own families in exchange for providing a safe, healthy educational experience for the students in their communities.
- Unlike school administrators and teachers, classified school employees are hourly (often low) wage employees who are not compensated based on an annual salary, but only earn income for the hours that they work.
- Classified school employees are the only remaining large group of hourly workers, including seasonal workers, who are not eligible to receive unemployment compensation when their employer closes their workplace.
- Classified school employees must pay into the unemployment system each month even though they are not allowed to access the system other than in exceptional circumstances.
- Every year many of these dedicated professionals decide they must leave to find other jobs because they simply cannot afford to live months at a time without income.
- Although providing unemployment insurance is considered a mandatory cost of doing business for every other employer, school districts and other education entities with agreement from the legislature are allowed to avoid this responsibility.
- Each year school districts must face the hidden costs of very high turnover in its highly trained and qualified workforce that is necessary to provide the education students require.

These employees deserve the same respect and consideration as other educators and in the case of eligibility for unemployment insurance when they are laid off, the same respect and consideration as virtually every other worker.

We hope SB 470 and this hearing open your eyes to this injustice, and that we can begin a serious discussion of how school districts can provide the same basic insurance program to our educators that every other employer must provide to every other worker. We hope that you will help and support us in this effort for the sake of our dedicated educators, and for our students who rely on them.